

The other evening when I got home from a long day at the domino hall, a dead cat was lying on the dining room table. For those of you unfamiliar with the life of a squawman, the incident will be hard to explain; but to those of you who have married into Indian blood, the message will be clear that an ill wind was hitting my lodgekeeper.

You see, her people have always communicated by symbols. Indian wives, for example, would never out and out scold their husbands.

Say that squaw Loping Brown wanted to tell her brave, Ratchet Lung, that his snoring was making a bellows of the teepee at night. Instead of waiting until the papooses were asleep to launch a 65 minute speech enumerating how many chances she passed up to marry a deaf mute banker, she would probably merely put a few pounds of finely ground porcupine needles in Ratchet's bed.

Loping Brown would have eaten a cooked fish before she'd have told Ratchet that he ought to go see his medicine man for a check up, or start sleeping on his stomach before everybody in the tent had to have a check up. Domestic negotiations by the broom handle and the vocal cord were unknown among the tribes. Cases of marriage counseling by the witch doctors were so outscored by porcupine needle extractions that fees for martial peace making weren't even published.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs doesn't have any material on "dead cat omens." Washington based Indian experts don't live within a tomahawk handle's length of their subjects. The politicians would work harder on Indian lore if they'd come in some evening and find such an ominous sign on their dining table. I knew when I wrote them that they wouldn't be able to tell which end of a war club would make the biggest knot.

One of my compadres told me I ought to stop worrying about finding the dead cat. I told him that was the sort of advice the folks who drowned in the Galveston Flood back in the 1900s were handing out when the tide first started rising.

Don't worry indeed! I wouldn't close both of my eyes around this house if I was hit in the face with a bucket of hot ashes. Until this cat deal blows over, worrying and watching are going to be my primary way of life.

Kit Carson and those other famous squawmen made taking an Indian wife sound awfully romantic. Carson, they say, was buried with a full head of hair, so it may be that things will smooth out and dead cats will turn out to be a family joke.